

FTF Board Wrap-Up

December 8, 2009

New Leadership at First Things First

At its December 8 meeting, the Board unanimously selected Rhian Evans Allvin as the next Executive Director of First Things First. Current Executive Director Elliott Hibbs is retiring, but will stay with FTF through the transition. Rhian brings a wealth of experience in early childhood to First Things First, having served in leadership positions with Children's Action Alliance (a statewide child advocacy group), the Arizona Community Foundation (a non-profit focused on education reform) and Libraries for the Future. She has extensive experience as a public policy consultant and advocate, most recently as a partner in the Brecon Group. Rhian also was one of the principal authors of the citizen's ballot initiative that created First Things First and served for nearly three years on the statewide Board. She will join FTF in mid-February.

Also at the December 8 meeting, the Board unanimously elected Dr. Eugene Thompson as its Vice Chair. Dr. Thompson has provided a lifetime of service in education, having held top level leadership and/or teaching positions at several K-12 districts and universities. He also has consulted with the U.S. Department of State and the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. Gene has served on the FTF Board since its inception, most recently as Program Committee Chair.

Regional Funding Plans:

The Board approved 2011 Funding Plans for the following Regional Partnership Councils: Colorado River Indian Tribes, Hualapai Tribe, LaPaz/Mohave, Cochise, Graham/Greenlee, San Carlos Apache, Coconino, White Mountain Apache Tribe, Northeast Maricopa, North Phoenix, and the Gila River Indian Community.

The Board thanked the Regional Council members and coordinators who presented the plans for their commitment to children. Board members also praised the Council members for their funding plans, which

demonstrated a commitment to building on previous funding plans to promote the continued expansion of a comprehensive early childhood system in each community.

While the Board held proposed communications strategies pending the development of FTF's comprehensive public awareness campaign strategy and plan (expected in late March), the Board did approve specific parent education strategies.

The Board is expected to review funding plans for the remaining 19 Regional Partnership Councils at its January 26, 2010 meeting.

System Framework Development Process and Timeline

On October 28, members of the Program Committee met with seven Regional Council representatives who provided insight on the desired early childhood system vision, principals, objectives, characteristics and components. The group emphasized the importance of a systems design approach that engages stakeholders, especially the Regional Councils, in determining priorities. The proposed objectives of the system are:

- A shared vision of what we want for Arizona's children;
- Ownership from all constituencies;
- A shared understanding of what a comprehensive early childhood development system looks like; and,
- A useful framework that is developed with Regional Councils to help FTF set specific, measureable outcomes and benchmarks; set statewide funding priorities; and build a public affairs agenda.

Regional meetings on system building will take place in Spring 2010, and then the framework will be presented to the Board. The Board will appoint a Task Force to oversee this process and ensure timely completion of this foundational work.

Statewide Affordability and Accessibility Strategies

Sandy Foreman, Assistant Director for Policy and Research reported back to the Board that FTF staff had reviewed the affordability and accessibility strategies that are implemented across the country in order to analyze their benefits, challenges and feasibility for Arizona. Strategies already implemented by FTF, as well as new ideas put forth by community stakeholders and advocates, were included in the analysis.

Staff found that affordability is a huge issue in other states as well as in Arizona, and that the most successful have been those that have public/private support for a variety of strategies. FTF staff concluded that the most feasible strategies right now are those that FTF already is implementing: child care scholarships, quality stipends, and targeted expansion of early care and education programs.

The Board sent a strong message that FTF supports effective access and affordability strategies tied to quality improvement. The Board directed staff to develop an immediate plan to move forward with continuing or enhancing the current FTF access and affordability strategies, as well as to continue to explore long-term strategies during the System Framework development.

Funding Plan Guidance Revision: Construction or Purchase of Real Property

The Board approved the FTF Funding Plan Guidance Regarding Construction or Purchase of Real Property. In order to enhance the quality, access and affordability of early child care and education settings, the Board will consider allocating funds for capital expenditures, including the purchase of real property, building renovation and new construction. The approved guidance was distributed to Regional Coordinators and Managers.

Statewide Needs and Assets Report

The Board approved *Building Brighter Futures: Arizona's Early Childhood Opportunities Report 2009*. As required by state statute, the report was completed on December 15 and posted to the FTF Web site at:

<http://www.azftf.gov/WhoWeAre/Board/Pages/ReportsandPubs.aspx>

Budget Updates From the Arizona Department of Economic Security (DES, Health Services (DHS) and Education (ADE)

Sharon Sergent, DES Deputy Director, reported that in the last year and a half, state General Fund support of DES has been cut by nearly \$250 million. The cuts have had drastic impacts to programs serving the most vulnerable children and families. A summary of the cuts can be located at:

<https://egov.azdes.gov/cmsinternet/main.aspx?menu=12&id=3726>

Amy Corriveau, ADE Deputy Associate Superintendent for Early Childhood, reported that, as a result of the most recent budget cuts, ADE is going to lose approximately \$144 million in soft capital funds. Ms. Corriveau said those reductions will be made to administrative costs in order to minimize the impact to classrooms.

Dr. Will Humble, Acting Director of DHS, reported that the agency has had its General Fund budget reduced by \$60 million in fiscal year 2009. The cuts impacted many programs serving children and families. A summary of these impacts can be found at:

<http://www.azdhs.gov/pdf/Budget%20Reductions%20Draft%2010-0809%20-final.pdf>

Editor's Note: These agency reports were provided prior to the Legislature's Fifth Special Session, which took place December 17-20, 2009. As a result of the special session, additional cuts were expected in all three agencies, and Governor Jan Brewer directed state agencies to prepare for even further cuts. FTF will ask DES, DHS and ADE to provide updated budget impacts at the January 26, 2010 Board meeting.

Financial Update

FTF Executive Director Elliott Hibbs reported that there has been a 15 percent drop in tobacco revenues this year compared to last. Director Hibbs stated that FTF is continuing to look for ways to reduce operating costs. FTF operating expenditures were \$198,547 under budget for the month of November and \$566,990 under budget so far this fiscal year.